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KT photo | **Tim Bath**
Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor

House of Burgess: Turn back the clock on DST

Hoosiers should again stand against change.

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

One day a few years ago, I was in the newsroom at the Ukiah Daily Journal in Ukiah, Calif., when I found out Daylight Saving Time would soon be upon us. I loudly complained about this fact.

My friend and fellow reporter, Zack, began laughing from behind his desk. He was also from Indiana. He understood. He said only someone from Indiana even has an opinion about DST. And he was right.

For the first 23 years of my life, I lived in a state that did not bend to the whims of the rest of the country. Starting in 1970, Indiana remained defiant for three dozen years. That we joined most of Arizona (with the exception of the Navajo Nation), Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands in refusing to change our clocks made me proud to be a native Hoosier.

Besides the convenience of having the same time all year, it made sense for a state like Indiana to resist such a change. Indiana also has a large agrarian economy. Farming is dictated by things like the sun; not arbitrary, man-made constructions like time. The Earth does not spin on its axis at our whim. Those closest to the Earth understand this.

Changing time is arrogant to begin with. It's arbitrary. Time itself is a feeble human construction, but DST, which ends Sunday, is about as ham-fisted as it gets. Nature continues its course regardless of what time we say it is or isn't. If we actually were trying to be correct in reference to the ever-changing course of the planet's trek around the sun, we'd change the time every day, every hour, every minute, every second. This is, in fact, what occurred in every locality until the late 19th century.

I'm not advocating for the resurrection of this provincial system. The standardization of time was an important advancement. DST is one step over the line, though.

Further complicating this entire situation is the contentious debate in Indiana over whether the state should continue as mostly Eastern Time and some Central Time or else all convert to one or the other.

Originally, DST was only invented to further both World Wars and was dropped once peace prevailed each time. That all changed with the federal Uniform Time Act of 1966. Four years later, Indiana was one of a handful of areas to say, “no thanks.”

And now? We’re just like everyone else. Gov. Mitch Daniels’ 2006 signing of Indiana’s change to DST was a huge disappointment and disruption. The defenders of DST often use fatuous examples to further their case. It makes sense for the business community to support DST: more hours when more consumers are more awake later in the day with more sunlight means more goods and services sold. While not convincing to me, at least it’s an honest argument.

But when James Benfield, a lobbyist for The Clorox Co. and 7-Eleven Corp., testified May 24, 2001, before the U.S. House Committee on Science, Subcommittee on Energy (which included then Rep. now Gov. Mike Pence), the first words out of his mouth weren’t about consumerism. They were, in essence: think of the children.

“The fatal accident that is avoided because of more afternoon daylight, it will never be reported,” he said. “The child whose life is saved because a

driver slammed on the brakes in the nick of time will never see his photo in the news.” Give me a break.

I’ve always resisted DST, and I will continue to stand in opposition to it. But I refuse to let this get me down. I have to keep living my life in the world in which I find myself. While I will always have an opinion about DST, I understand disagreeing with the official time is inherently quixotic. But I wouldn’t be upset if we rose as one and once again threw the DST yoke from off our backs.

Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor, may be reached by calling 765-454-8577, via email at rob.burgess@kokomotribune.com or on Twitter at twitter.com/robaburg.